

## Chapter 4

### Economic Development Node Plans

## Chapter 4 - Economic Development Node Plans

In Chapter 2: *Revitalization Strategies*, Economic Development Node Plans were introduced. This chapter focuses specifically on the Economic Node Plans and how they can be used to foster economic development within the Northside Village.

These Economic Development Node Plans (EDN Plans) put forth possible, economic-development scenarios for revitalization, focusing on an area  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile around a major commercial intersection. These EDN Plans present development options based on community priorities, as well as, physical improvements that can spur economic development by making the area more inviting, convenient and livable (improvements may include pedestrian amenities such as improved sidewalks and trees, more transportation options and better connections to the rest of the community). Several economic development nodes were identified in the Northside Village:

- **Economic Development Node 1 (EDN1) and Economic Development Node 1A (EDN 1A).** EDN 1 includes the area along Main Street from IH 10 to Boundary Street and focuses on the intersections of Main Street with Quitman Street and Hogan Street. EDN 1A focuses on Main Street and the Hardy Rail Yard, just north of IH 10.
- **Economic Development Node 2 (EDN 2)** is located along Irvington between Hays Street on the south, and Cavalcade on the north. This node plan focuses around one of the largest tracts of land offering redevelopment potential – the American Freightways facility on the east side of Irvington Street at Patton Street.

EDN 1 and EDN 1A are part of the Main Street Corridor Revitalization Project area and are identified in the *Main Street Corridor Master Plan* as a potential location for a regional transit hub and an important gateway into downtown (The Main Street



Northside Nodes

Corridor Revitalization Project is an initiative to create a signature transit and pedestrian oriented corridor along Main Street. *The Main Street Corridor Master Plan*, developed in 2000, is the guide for the revitalization of the corridor and for creating a unified

corridor that recognizes the unique traits of each distinct area within the larger corridor).

Within the Main Street Corridor area, a light rail system is under construction, which has the potential to be extended into the Northside Village. Therefore, a key component of the Economic Development Node Plans is light rail transit. While these nodes can function well even without light rail, an extension into the Northside Village's major commercial corridors would provide tremendous benefit to the community. The vastly improved access to downtown via the light rail system would not only increase the area's desirability as a regional destination but would also serve to attract corresponding economic development opportunities.

Presently, METRO is undertaking feasibility studies to determine the best possible alignment for this extension. One potential alignment is through the center of Northside Village. The community's preferred alignment (see Chapter 3: *Implementation* for more details) connects existing commercial centers and proposed nodes.

## Economic Development Node 1 (EDN1)

Because of existing development in the area and the construction of a new elementary school, this area (Main Street between Boundary and Quitman) holds much potential for redevelopment, especially for professional and medical services. Two major clinic facilities, a bank, the Salvation Army and Lamar/Lee Elementary School currently anchor this node. A newly-opened Head Start program, the Northside Redevelopment Center and town homes currently under construction have joined the mix of uses in this node.



*Node 1: Main Street*  
**Revitalization Opportunities (EDN1)**  
**Quitman Street Area.** Potential for new development and revitalization exists at this intersection with the stage set by current, new development, historic structures that could be



*Main St. - Current*



*Main St. - Potential*

rehabilitated and/or vacant or underutilized sites. Potential types of development include school supply shops, pharmacy, professional offices and medical services and some specialty uses. The proximity of the Harris County courts, approximately a mile to the south, provide opportunities to attract and support industries for the legal community. In addition, there is opportunity for commercial development that presently exists within the residential neighborhoods to relocate along the major corridors – Main Street, Quitman and Hogan. Hogan and Quitman provide especially good opportunities for the type of neighborhood scale-retail that the community desires.

**Hogan/Main Area.** The southeastern quadrant of the intersection of Hogan and Main Street present different opportunities. Currently occupied by light industrial, commercial and metals

recycling, this area presents an opportunity to bring new housing – of all scales and types, including a focus on housing for college students attending nearby University of Houston Downtown– into a corner that long ago transitioned to less desirable and compatible uses. New residential development could also border the edges of White Oak Bayou, providing unparalleled vistas of downtown. While new retail and services will be secondary to the projected residential, the existing clinics would benefit from additional professional offices along with support services such as pharmacies and medical testing and laboratory operations along Main Street.



*Main St. - Future*

Concentrating commercial development and non-compatible uses along the Corridor and out of the interior of residential neighborhoods would stabilize them. Moreover, new development and redevelopment could stimulate improvement of residential areas adjacent to commercial corridors.





Node 1A: Main Street

### EDN 1A: Main Street & Hardy Rail Yard

Economic Development Node 1A lies to the south of EDA 1 and encompasses a large tract of land (approximately 50 acres recently purchased from Union Pacific), now under single ownership and prime for redevelopment.

### Revitalization Opportunities

This area's proximity to downtown provides significant potential for mixed-use redevelopment with densities that approach those of Downtown and the Midtown areas.

### Re-use of Existing Buildings

The site contains multiple turn-of-the century equipment, repair shops, a roundtable and locomotive sheds, miscellaneous service buildings, refueling stations and 1940's and 50's era rail administrative structures. The existing structures present multiple opportunities for adaptive reuse (modifying the existing structure and using it for new uses such as shops or residential lofts). These could be uses ranging from rail museum to multi-use containing retail, service and housing. Artist studios (taking advantage of the existing art colony immediately south), craft workshops and local manufacturing/small industrial incubator spaces could also be located here and are particularly desirable to the Northside Village.

**Mixed Use.** The rail yard provides substantial potential for new housing, mixed-use, corporate campus environments ranging from office to business-technology to light-industrial/heavy arts/crafts/publishing uses, plus the educational community. The Fulton Street extension through the rail yard would provide new access and stimulus for growth from Downtown. Supporting this reconnection to downtown would be the reconnection of Hardy Street on the ground at the eastern end of the rail yard. Existing rights-of-way provide a smooth connection to McKee Street and into the Ballpark neighborhood of downtown.

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**Residential Development.** The areas within the northeast quadrant of the rail yard present the greatest potential for new residential development. This area's proximity to existing historic housing stock, combined with its greater distance from IH 10 (buffered by the uses developed south of the rail lines), creates an opportunity to establish residential development of varying densities, types and price ranges.

**Commercial Uses.** The southern blocks between IH 10 and the rail lines provide ample opportunity for freeway-connected uses ranging from corporate office type campuses to business and technology centers. Existing publishing and arts establishments

could be expanded through the addition of audio and visual (sound and motion picture) production facilities. The area immediately south of the rail lines presents opportunities for light manufacturing and heavy arts development. The existing rail building stock provides the greatest opportunities for redevelopment that could range from arts to light manufacturing to incubator spaces for new start-ups within the technology and specialty manufacturing arenas.

**Historic Preservation.** These same buildings provide a unique opportunity for the city to celebrate its rail history. A rail museum and working restoration – repair shop enhanced by a sightseeing train operating from the Northside Village Rail Museum Yard would attract visitors from Houston and beyond.

**Transportation and Access.** Transportation within and around the rail yard leaves much to be desired; streets either dead-end at the edge of the property or where they do cross the active rail lines, are subject to lengthy blockages. The only non-interrupted streets are Main - via the underpass and the Hardy-Elysian pair - which are elevated and not pedestrian friendly. Due to the nature of its past usage, the rail yard effectively established a barrier between Northside Village and areas to the south.

To eliminate this barrier, which separates the Northside Village from downtown and stifles development, it is critical that Fulton Street be extended through the rail yard to connect to San Jacinto Street at its intersection with IH 10. Along Main Street, removal of the existing tunnel and construction of two new signature bridges - one for the remaining two rail lines and one for Burnett Street - could radically change the character of the area and physically and visually connect it to downtown and provide a symbolic gateway into the Northside Village.





Node 2: Irvington Boulevard

### Economic Development Tools

A number of economic development tools in the form of programs are available to the Northside Village. Most of these programs target businesses through technical and financial incentives, but

many provide direct benefits to the community at large such as job training, infrastructure improvements, and employment through local job creation. These tools include Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ), Public Improvement Districts (PID), tax abatements, the Enhanced Enterprise Community (EEC), Enterprise Zones (EZ), Brownfields Redevelopment Program, the Houston Small Business Development Corporation, and the One Stop Business Center. These and other tools can be found in the City's *CBO Toolbox* publication.

### EDN 2: Irvington Boulevard

This node focuses on Irvington between Hays Street (to the south) and Cavalcade (on the north). Four (4) blocks into the adjacent residential neighborhoods on the east and west sides of Irvington are included corresponding to a quarter mile standard walking distance. This node emerged as an area of focus largely because of its central location and the redevelopment potential of the large existing freight terminal on Irvington and Patton, as well as; the strength of existing businesses in the area.

Today, the Irvington node contains pockets of active retail and restaurant development, side-by-side with institutional and heavy commercial. Intermingled along Irvington Boulevard proper are vacant properties, abandoned properties and automotive uses that are varied in their levels of development. Anchoring institutions range from an assisted living facility, two churches, restaurants, Looscan Elementary on the eastern edge, Irvington Park on the northeast corner and Clemente Martinez Elementary School and Moody Park on the southern end.

In the heart of this district is the freight terminal, on Irvington centered on the intersection with Patton Street, a site that currently raises safety concerns due to the volume of truck traffic and size





of the vehicles. Both freight forwarding services and equipment repair services take place on this site that encompasses an area equivalent to six (6) city blocks.

### Revitalization Opportunities

**Mixed Use and Transit-oriented Development.** Because the freight terminal is one of the largest properties, as well as under single ownership and with potential for redevelopment, it presents the opportunity to create a pedestrian village square with adjacent parking. Contained within and around the square uses, such as

new assisted living (the current facility has a 2 to 5 year waiting list), a clinic with professional offices, medical services, a theater, medium-size retailers with small shops clustered around, restaurants, residential and additional office type space could be developed. Residential and office space could be developed above the ground floor retail, with service and restaurant uses providing a round-the-clock level of activity and occupancy. This concentration of uses next to light rail creates an optimum opportunity for a light rail station and transit-oriented development that can serve not only local residents but also those riding the rail or bus.

Immediately to the east of this development is a site known in the neighborhood as the “chicken plant” due to its previous use. Currently an abandoned eyesore, this property is a large city block that has redevelopment potential. The property could be converted into primarily residential development or other uses such as an artist’s residence and studio colony.

**Commercial Development.** On Irvington Boulevard, Patton Street, Collingsworth Street and Fulton Street, significant opportunities present themselves for new retail and service infill, rehabilitation of existing retail and services, and new restaurants.

Fulton Street, which is already a major commercial corridor in this neighborhood, in particular provides prime opportunities for new development and redevelopment. First, the shallow block face immediately across from Moody Park presents the opportunity for new, higher-density-housing development above ground-floor service and retail. A primary asset of this location is the view of the park, bayou and greenway beyond.

A second possibility for this area is the creation of a multi-modal transit stop (buses and light rail) on the triangular block between Fulton, Irvington and Collingsworth (see pictures). This strategically located block could service current bus lines, any





future light rail extension, the adjacent school and future retail development. Such a micro-node could attract additional residential and commercial development, presenting an alternative to the previously identified square at the freight terminal site.

**Streetscape Improvements and Pedestrian Environment.** With or without new development/redevelopment, key to creating the pedestrian-oriented environment desired by Northside Village residents is the physical improvement of the public street environment (sidewalk areas, esplanades and roadways) along the major corridors in the neighborhood. Combined with the

proposed urban design guidelines, the image and physical workings of the core of this Economic Development Node could change the image of the area considerably, making it attractive to new investment as well as provide a much-needed, pedestrian-friendly setting.

As suggested in the Chapter 5: *Urban Design Guidelines*, by changing the relationship of new or existing development to the street edge and bringing development right up to the property edge with the street, the atmosphere can change from being heavily automobile oriented to a vital, urban and more livable combination of the pedestrian and automobile.

